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## Robinson, PRAISE AND BLAME: MORAL REALISM AND ITS APPLICATIONS

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*Praise and Blame: Moral Realism and Its Applications*, by Daniel L. Robinson. Princeton University Press, 2002. Pp. xi + 225. \$29.95 (paper).

PETER BYRNE, King's College London

This is a very clearly written, highly readable study of the objective basis of moral praise and blame. It will be of some interest to students of philosophy of religion.

The argument of the book can be briefly summarized as follows. In chapter one conditions are set down for praise and blame to be effective as forms of punishment and reward for actions. Praise and blame must be based on correct, objective ascriptions of moral qualities to acts. The qualities invoked must be relevant to praise and blame and be acknowledged as such. The source of praise and blame must have appropriate authority. There must be shared moral understandings in a community in which praise and blame takes place.

These conditions set the course for the rest of the book. Chapter 1 proceeds to argue for moral realism, so that the first condition can be met. Chapters 2 and 3 deal in claims stemming from the notion of moral luck. The targets here include forms of determinism (an incompatibilist account of freedom is defended). They also include contentions to the effect that circumstances rather than an agent's own character play a greater role in producing praise- or blameworthy conduct. There is considerable discussion of the likes of Williams and Nagel on moral luck. Chapter 4 targets psychoanalytic and other scientific accounts of mind in so far as they are presented as undermining the contention that we are, at least much of the time, responsible for our actions. Chapter 5 deals with the nature of punishment and forgiveness (recall: praise and blame are linked by Robinson to reward and punishment). The account of punishment here is non-utilitarian. Punishment under just law latches on to the real moral properties distorted or destroyed by unlawful conduct with a view to restoring the balance of justice thus disturbed.

What is one to say about the treatment of these manifold issues by Robinson? Those who accept a traditional objectivist view of morals and a libertarian view of the moral agent will find the book comforting and its eloquence agreeable. From such a standpoint, it will be found to contain a fund of common sense applied to manifold problems about the nature of morality and moral agency. But it must be stated that there is a certain superficiality about the treatment of the issues on which the author comments. In part this is due to the brevity with which they are treated in a study of such wide scope. For example, the huge topic of moral realism versus forms of subjectivism and projectionism contains much too much for Robinson's arguments on the matter to appear decisive. Similar things can be said about his treatment of free will and responsibility. Chapter 2 notes the case against liberty of indifference conceptions of these notions which stems from the recent assault on the principle of alternate possibilities mounted by Frankfurt and his able supporters such as John Martin Fischer. The conclusion (on p.74) of the discussion appears to be the somewhat lame "There is ample room for conviction on both sides of the

Frankfurt line". The types of arguments Robinson offers for free will, such as we have free will because the mind has *selective* powers of attention to particulars (98) and that determinism is self-refuting because it asks us to *choose* an intellectual position on the basis of argument (100), hardly seem compelling.

Robinson is undoubtedly on the side of the angels (as I count them) but his study lacks philosophical depth. A final illustration of this point may be given. Chapter 5 turns on p. 196 to the topic of forgiveness and moral responsibility. The discussion has little direct bearing on topics in the philosophy of religion; the implications of what is contended for thoughts about divine forgiveness are simply not spelled out (that is not a criticism). Philosophers of religion might nonetheless hope to find something substantive on the question of whether forgiveness of wrong done requires repentance and atonement. On p.199 we are told, with very little surrounding argument, that "Forgiveness requires atonement on the part of the offender". This looks like mere assertion, but it is an assertion which is deeply controversial given recent debates on the conceptual analysis of forgiveness. It appears to rule out at a stroke the notion of unconditional forgiveness. Yet we can find good arguments in the literature for the belief that wrongdoers can and should be forgiven in the absence of either repentance and atonement, and without forgiveness necessarily collapsing into condoning (see, for example, E. Garrard and D. McNaughton "In defence of unconditional forgiveness", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 103, 2003, pp. 39-60).

*Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Kevin Schilbrack. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. Pp. x + 278. \$90.00 (cloth), \$25.95 (paper).

JAMES BEILBY, Bethel University

The resurgence in philosophy of religion in the last forty years has been well documented. But this increasing willingness on the part of philosophers to take seriously religious concepts and practices has not raised all boats equally. The study of religious rituals as well as their nonreligious counterparts has been largely ignored by the philosophical community. This edited volume sets out to repair that deficiency.

In the introduction, the editor, Kevin Schilbrack, provides a relatively comprehensive review of the various philosophical resources available for the study of rituals. His central contention is that "there are rich and extensive philosophical resources with which one might build bridges between ritual and thought, between practice and belief, and between body and mind" (1). Schilbrack considers the following philosophical approaches or 'schools of thought': pragmatism, post-Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy (including Searle's speech act theory), existentialism, hermeneutic philosophy (especially Ricoeur's), Foucault's genealogical method, phenomenology (especially Merleau-Ponty's), cognitive science, feminist philoso-